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ABSTRACT

Although Kohlberg has stated that his moral reasoning theory is a refinement of Jean Piaget's and John Dewey's approaches, some educators have concluded that Kohlberg has misinterpreted Dewey's approach. However, the statement that Kohlberg is not of the Deweyan tradition seems unfounded. Actually, a thorough examination shows that numerous commonalities exist between the two approaches. For example, Kohlberg has demonstrated that not only did Dewey postulate three levels of moral reasoning, but that these levels correspond to his own three levels as well. There are additional areas of fundamental agreement: (1) both see the organism as actively interacting with the environment to seek equilibrium; (2) both make a distinction between the content and process of thinking; (3) both support major changes in the educational system with a more implicit concern for moral education and a de-emphasis on highly competitive achievement; (4) both argue against educational practices inculcating moral beliefs upon students; (6) both emphasize that education should be more democratic; and (7) both accentuate the importance of the child's perception of environmental consequences to actions. It appears that the differences between the two approaches are a matter of degree and are more congruent than originally concluded. (LH)

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Dewey and Kohlberg:

A Comparative Analysis

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Dewey and Kohlberg:
A Comparative Analysis

No one can deny the considerable influence that John Dewey's work has had in the area of education. However, many of his ideas have failed to be fully understood and/or implemented. With this idea in mind, Lawrence Kohlberg has attempted to incorporate Dewey's approach in his own moral reasoning theory.

Kohlberg has often stated that his moral reasoning theory is a refinement of Jean Piaget's and John Dewey's approaches (Kohlberg, 1972, 1973, 1975; Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). However, one researcher (Pietig, 1980) and other educators have concluded that Kohlberg has misinterpreted Dewey's approach and is not part of the Deweyan tradition. Thus, this paper will examine the two approaches to determine the extent of similarities and differences.

In examining this issue, Pietig (1980) correctly states that Kohlberg believes that students should be more involved in the social and moral decisions of the school and that teachers should not indoctrinate their personal views/beliefs upon the students. Furthermore, she correctly notes that Kohlberg's aim for moral education is the attainment of higher stages of moral development. This goal is illustrated in part by Kohlberg's use of moral dilemmas that are discussed individually or in a group setting. It is felt that this procedure helps students to experience cognitive conflict (i.e., disequilibrium) and leads to an awareness of the adequacy of

of higher level moral reasoning.

Later in her review, Pietig (1980) states that she believes that there are two fundamental differences between Dewey's and Kohlberg's approaches. The first difference is the fact that Dewey does not posit universal stages of moral reasoning. Secondly, she asserts that Dewey's conception of ethics is incongruent with Kohlberg's conception of morality.

In response to whether or not Dewey has postulated levels of moral reasoning, Kohlberg (1975) has already demonstrated that not only did Dewey postulate three levels of moral reasoning, but that these levels correspond to his own three levels as well. For instance, Dewey states that at the first level, moral conduct arises from instincts and is governed by fundamental needs (i.e., behavior is motivated by biological, social, and some psychological impulses). Thus, society is seen as assigning "good" or "bad" connotations on the behavior (Dewey & Tufts, 1908). Closely related is Kohlberg's first level where the person,

> ...is responsive to cultural rules and labels of good and bad...but interprets these labels either in terms of the physical or hedonistric consequences of action... or in terms of the physical power of those who enunciate the rules and labels. (Kohlberg, 1975, p. 671)

At Dewey's second level, moral behavior is "...regulated by standards of society, for some more or less conscious end..." (Dewey & Tufts, 1908, p. 38). At this level, the individual

accepts the standards of his/her group with little critical reflection. This corresponds with Kohlberg's second level where the individual maintains that the expectations of the family, group, or nation are valuable in its own right (Kohlberg, 1975).

Dewey's third level is where moral behavior is "...regulated by a standard which is both social and rational, which is examined and criticized. The level of conscience." (Dewey & Tufts, 1908, p. 38) Hence, individual thinking, judging, and reflection determine whether or not one accepts the standards of others.

Kohlberg's third level is highly similar in nature. This is where the individual makes

> ...a clear effort to define moral values and principles that have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles and apart from the individual's own identification with these groups. (Kohlberg, 1975, p. 671)

Noting the importance of his stages, Dewey states that:

> Only knowledge of the order and connection of the stages in the development of the psychical functions can... insure the full meaning and free...exercise of the psychical powers. In a word, education itself is precisely the work of supplying the conditions which will enable the psychical functions, as they successively arise, to mature and pass into higher functions in the freest and fullest manner, and this result can be secured only by

knowledge of the process.... (Dewey, 1964a, pp. 207-208)

Several other areas of fundamental agreement exist between Kohlberg's and Dewey's approaches. These other similarities include:

(1) The organism actively interacts with the environment and seeks equilibrium (Archambault, 1964; Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972).

(2) Both make a distinction between the content of thinking and the form or process of thinking. Specifically, reflective thinking is viewed as the product of higher, more specialized mental processes (Dewey, 1964b, 1971; Kohlberg, 1973, 1975).

(3) Both support major changes in the educational system which would make the school more democratic with a more implicit concern for moral education and deemphasize highly competitive, academic achievement (Dewey, 1909, 1973; Kohlberg, 1972, 1975).

(4) Both argue against educational practices inculcating moral beliefs upon students (i.e., the transmission of consensual values) (Dewey, 1973; Kohlberg, 1973, 1975).

(5) Both emphasize a need for the school to recognize its responsibility of providing moral educational opportunities whereby the student can hypothesize solutions to problems and test these hypotheses (Dewey, 1971; Kohlberg, 1972, 1973, 1975).

(6) Furthermore, both emphasize that education should be more democratic, encouraging participation in order to instill implicit notions of citizenship in the student (Dewey, 1909, 1971; Kohlberg, 1972, 1975, 1976).

(7) Finally, both accentuate the importance of the child's

perception of environmental consequences to actions (Dewey, 1971; Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972).

While it is true that a source of difference exists between Dewey's and Kohlberg's approaches, it is not an irreconcilable difference as some would have one believe nor does it represent an incongruence of Dewey's conception of ethics and Kohlberg's conception of morality. This difference can best be explained in terms of "macro" versus "micro."

Dewey places more emphasis on the training of students for life in a democratic society. He views a democracy not only as a form of government but as a way of life. He states that education should enable the student to adapt to changes and to have power to shape and direct these changes. Thus, Dewey emphasizes the macro effect of education--supplying students with social power (Dewey, 1909, 1916).

Kohlberg, on the other hand, is more interested in elucidating the stages of moral development and how one can facilitate this development. Thus, he is more interested in studying the micro effect of education--moral development (Kohlberg, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1976).

It would seem that some educators and researchers have misinterpreted the practical applications of Kohlberg's approach. Specifically, most fail to mention that the moral dilemmas are only one example of how the cognitive-developmental approach can be applied in a school. As Kohlberg has stated, "The classroom discussion approach should be part of a broader,

more enduring involvement of students in the social and moral functioning of the school...." (Kohlberg, 1972, p. 16) Furthermore, these educators often fail to note the numerous commonalities between the two approaches.

If Pietig (1980) and other educators conducted a more thorough examination of the similarities and differences between the two approaches, perhaps they would recognize that the two are much more congruent than originally concluded. Thus, the statement that Kohlberg is not of the Deweyan tradition seems unfounded.

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